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UNCLAS RANGOON 001359

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: VIEW FROM A RANGOON STREET KIDS SHELTER

1. SUMMARY: On October 21 the director of an NGO-funded Rangoon street kids drop-in shelter reported an absence of GOB impressment for portering and forced enlistment of street children compared to previous years. The shelter director believes the U.S. sanctions have increased local unemployment as Rangoon-area companies are unable to pay for imported raw materials and must layoff workers. However, she claimed the closing of garment factories has not resulted in an increase of street kids. END SUMMARY.

REACHING OUT TO STREET ORPHANS

2. On October 21 visiting EAP/BCLTV Director and Poloff toured an NGO-funded street kids drop-in shelter in Rangoon. World Vision established the shelter in 1997, with the mission to protect street children from abuse and educate them on health and hygiene. The center provides a place to stay for up to three years for about 10 girls and 40 boys who are street orphans or whose parent(s) are living on the streets themselves. The shelter's outreach program provides much needed nutritional and medical care to children suffering from malnutrition and other diseases associated with poverty. Through word-of-mouth, the shelter attracts a small fraction of the estimated thousands of children living on the streets of Rangoon. Freedom to come and go during the day is very appealing and allows some kids to find light work in the nearby market to earn pocket money. One of the Center's goals is to informally educate the street kids, who have never attended state schools, by giving them an equivalent to the GOB's minimum standard of a fourth-level education.

NO MORE FORCED PORTERING?

3. The Shelter director and three teenage residents reported that they haven't heard of any cases in the past two years in which street kids were press ganged in Rangoon for military portering duties. Forced military recruiting has taken a different turn as well. The Army recruiters still corral underage teens to get them to join the military, but now those who don't want to join are released. Recently, two underage teens from the shelter were taken to join the army, but one said "no thanks" and was allowed to return to the shelter. The other, described as a difficult youth, was not let go.

UNEMPLOYMENT UP

4. The shelter director claimed that sanctions have increased local area unemployment because factories could not pay for needed import materials and were forced to layoff workers. However, there have not been any children of garment factory workers turning up at the shelter.

5. COMMENT: This is the first report received of a cessation in street children being forced into military portering. It is also the first time post has heard that army "recruiters" are giving underage teens the option to say "no" to a recruitment pitch.

6. (U) This message was cleared by EAP/BCLTV Director Judith Strotz.
McMullen